



*Horticulture is perhaps one of the oldest healing arts. Many of our individuals enjoy working with plants and there is a wide spectrum of horticulture therapy activities that can address the needs of these individuals. This is especially important for people with developmental disabilities as it promotes vocational skills, relaxation and responsibility. The plant world is non-threatening and nondiscriminatory. Its "peacefulness and tranquility" are the most important satisfactions gained. Thus, it appears that working in a horticultural setting provides an atmosphere in which it is easier for people to relate to one another, may be used to establish a nonverbal relationship and be a great opportunity for consumers that have behavioral issues.*

In May 9, 2007, we received a \$5,000 legislative grant that Assemblyman Robert Reilly was able to secure for us. These funds were used to purchase a Greenhouse for the Horticulture Program at our Clifton Park Day site based on suggestions of the individuals we serve who had an interest in gardening. Classrooms are busy throughout the spring, summer and fall. In the early spring, they plant flowers and vegetables. They have the opportunity to use hybrid and planting techniques. In the summer months, gardens are planted around the building. The individuals rake, dig, weed, nurture and care for their plants. All the while, they eagerly await the results of their labor. In the late summer, recipes and baking projects abound around the ripening produce. Flowers are in full bloom and the participants pick and arrange fresh bouquets as well as assembling others for dried centerpieces. In the fall, seeds are gathered and dried. Yet during the winter, the individuals are idle awaiting the arrival of spring. This translates into almost ½ of the year. With the Greenhouse, our consumers are involved in a Horticultural Program all year long.

The Horticultural Program provides the ideal setting for acquiring needed social skills. Each individual, depending on their ability level, benefits from this activity. Their senses are aroused and their self-esteem is increased through these activities as they take great pride in their endeavors. Our groups especially enjoy the wide range of creative opportunities. They can be seen working diligently, intently and happily on crafts that involve flowers and herbs they grow and attend to. Lastly, they take special satisfaction in keeping the garden in prime condition.

A year later, Assemblyman Reilly secured a \$3,400 legislative grant to piggyback on the Horticultural Project. These funds enabled us to create a Nature Trail around the property by allowing us to purchase many needed items including a skill saw, hammers, cordless drill, shovels, rakes, wheelbarrow, pressure treated wood, flowers, shrubbery, mulch and gravel. It consists of benches for people to rest along the way and enjoy the surroundings, a wooden bridge, railings for safety purposes and easy access. Our staff and participants constructed sand now nurture and care for the trail.

The Nature Trail provides a safe outdoor learning environment to learn about the different types of plants, flowers, weather and wild life. It has wooden areas for flowers and shrubs to flourish. They use starting seeds, grow plants and flowers within the greenhouse, and then replant them outside. The Nature Trail is peaceful and tranquil and fosters their senses by being outside.

Since 2008, they have established workgroups and Horticulture groups. They take ownership of the programs and have segwayed into creating flower arrangements that become raffle prizes. With the funds generated, they can support other non-funded activities.

Saratoga Bridges received a grant in the amount of \$1,098 from Saratoga County Citizens Committee for Mental Health (SCCCMH). The funds were used to purchase a Greenhouse that will incorporate a Horticultural Project into the schedule of activities at our Malta facility. Since horticulture therapy is one of the oldest healing arts, a Greenhouse presents a great opportunity for individuals with developmental disabilities and those with a dual diagnosis of mental health issues. The tranquil environment offers an ideal venue for our consumers to interact and practice social skills. In fact, Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and considered to be the "Father of American Psychiatry," reported that a peaceful garden setting has proven to hold 'curative effects for people with mental illness'. We fervently believe this Greenhouse promotes better mental health for our individuals while providing curative effects.

In addition to gardening, the Greenhouse will allow the participants the space to do the following:

- Grow vegetables, fruits & herbs to use for cooking
- Decorate garden gloves, aprons, t-shirts and hats
- Assemble sachet bags, making dry flowers, corsages and flower arrangements
- Open a Horticultural business
- Donate flowers, plants and produce to their volunteer sites

In addition, we continue to develop the property at our Wilton Day Program. In 2000, 10 highly motivated employees formed a Staff Incentive Team to ensure that consumers' needs were exceeded while enhancing the program environment. Throughout their tenure they have accomplished many projects. Their next undertaking was to enhance the property behind the building. It consists of erecting a pavilion, expanding their horticulture activities, installing a nature trail and constructing a recreation area. The inspiration for this large project is to maximize the potential for further programmatic usage on land.

We received a very generous grant in 2010 of \$30,000 from The Wright Family Foundation, Inc. to erect The Wright Family Foundation Pavilion. This sheltered area allows the participants a chance to experience and enjoy the natural surroundings of the property without concern for insects, precipitation or temperature. The next steps will be to create an outdoor garden that expands their horticultural activities similar to those at other sites. The program already has a Greenhouse where they grow flowers and plants. They will be incorporating a Nature Trail made of crushed stone around the property. It will have benches for people to rest and enjoy the surroundings, shrubs, bird baths, a small fish pond and garden decorations. Our participants and staff will be able to help maintain the Nature Trail which will provide physical activity. It will offer a safe outdoor learning environment to learn about the different types of plants, weather and wild life. The activities of starting seeds, growing plants and flowers within the Greenhouse, and then replanting them outside, will only capitalize on our entire horticultural program. The participants can explore the plants basic needs and structures, learn about plant life cycles and reproduction and find out how plants adapt to different environmental conditions. The Nature Trail will be peaceful and tranquil while providing an atmosphere that will not be intimidating and offer a place for consumers who have behavioral issues. Their senses will be maximized and fostered by being outside.

Our intent is to collaborate all of these programmatic enhancements with our neighbors, Teddy Bear Day Care Center and the Home of the Good Shepherd assisted living facility. We want to create activities that share these experiences for inter-generational populations, raise awareness of people with developmental disabilities and develop new friendships.

Every consumer, regardless of their ability level, benefits from the Horticulture Programs. The following are intellectual, social, emotional/psychological and physical advancements:

#### Intellectual –

- Learning new skills, planning new projects and gaining new abilities as they develop the techniques and decision-making methods needed for the project.
- Access to improving their vocabulary and communication skills as they learn new terms and concepts.
- Curiosity piqued and gaining an appreciation of nature due to the fascinating beauty of plants, flowers, birds and other wildlife and weather.
- Increasing their attention span while learning to focus, observe and concentrate more succinctly. This also leads to an improved ability to make decisions and to generate motivation.
- Stimulation of their sensory perceptions. Their perception of their surroundings can be expanded as they view, hear, touch, taste, and smell the “fruits of their labor.”
- Challenges and responsibilities for projects for which they can see tangible results through their efforts.

#### Social –

- Learning how to interact and relate to one another in a more meaningful way as they work together toward a common goal. Team-building teaches them to participate in a group activity, learn to respect the rights of others and to be more cooperative.

#### Emotional/Psychological –

- Able to improve their self-confidence, self-image and self-esteem and have pride in their success, sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.
- Opportunities to relieve aggressive tendencies and behavior in a more socially acceptable manner. The Nature Trail will provide many outlets that lead to improved self-control, learning how to cope with inevitable frustrations in gardening and helping prepare them to deal with other frustrations in everyday life.
- Activities that promote interest and enthusiasm for the future. This is a particular goal of people with developmental disabilities, who have lost interest in most daily activities.
- Able to utilize their self-expression and creative drives. Often newfound abilities are reached and discovered with a Horticultural Program.
- Learning to care and nurture their plants and flowers on the Nature Trail.

#### Physical –

- Able to relieve stress and exercise their fine and gross motor skill development. Specific activities can be used to improve muscle coordination and to train and tone unused muscles.